Brooklin Nov. 4. 1883

He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Mat. 10. 39

2012-010-035

They who have followed out of interest or curiosity the discussion concerning man's final destiny ~~and~~ now attracting so much attention - will have noticed how much ~~is made~~ depends upon the question - not itself much debated, ~~the question~~ whether all men have here a "fair chance" to come successfully out of the "probation" to which they are supposed to be subjected? - The word "probation" is however almost ridiculously inadequate to express the purpose of life's experiment. As well might one say that school ~~of~~ life - is for the child a state of probation, ~~as~~ making the chief object of teachers and schools to apply certain tests which should separate the competent from the incompetent. - The school is designed to train the mind for such work as it may afterwards find to do, and the discipline of life is supposed to fit the soul for the employments of its maturity in a ~~life~~ world to come. - That God has some work waiting for us hereafter for which he here puts our powers in training, is a reasonable belief. But to represent him as mainly intent upon finding out who can - and who cannot pass a certain test - or withstand a certain strain, ~~as~~ without reference to an ulterior end, is to ascribe to God very narrow purposes. — To begin with them

~~is~~ it is a childish notion - that we are set here to match our strength against temptation - in order that God may determine who is worthy and who unfit to inherit immortal blessedness, -- We are here to be trained and fitted for what is to come afterward - and according to our progress in spiritual development - so shall we take rank in that world where as we believe the real business of the soul lies, -- -- ¶ But supposing that this so called state of "probation" does end at death, can we say that every person has a "fair chance" of getting into heaven? - I apprehend that ~~that~~ it will require more juggling with words than champions of the old theology have hitherto displayed, though that is by no means inconsiderable - to show that on the terms of salvation they put before us no injustice is done, Though it be conceded that every soul has within its reach the possibility of ~~reaching~~ attaining heaven, yet as compared with others - many are under such enormous disadvantages and have such a vastly harder fight to make, that there is nothing like a fair or equal chance. If we see life as a long journey in

which death is only an incident, then these inequalities of condition make not so much difference. But if life is a race, with death as ~~the~~ its goal - and if this goal being won or lost, the condition of the soul is ~~now & forever~~ thereby fixed forever; then, I say, though we go so far beyond probability as to grant that ~~up~~ every soul by summoning its last atom of strength may reach the goal in season, yet there are so many favoring and impeding circumstances, the weakest are so often heavily handicapped, and the lame have frequently so much relative distance to cover, that men do not run ~~the~~ this race on anything like fair and equal terms. — As between the soul and its maker, God cannot vindicate Himself by saying - "The door is open for all of you if you will come in," while many of His children can say that for others the door is opened much wider than for them, and that for no fault of their own their way thither is set full of obstacles, while the the way of others is made plain and smooth; With the long perspective of an ~~ed~~ eternity before the mind, these inequalities cease to be troublesome. But when attention is fastened upon one near point - like that of our departure from earth, ~~these all~~ and all the future is made to turn upon that point - then all adventitious aids and impediments to holy living ~~have~~ ~~of~~ assume the greatest importance, and many are troubled to say that as compared with their fellows they have not

had a "fair chance".- There is another consideration ~~which leads~~ leading to a like conclusion - not very much taken note of I fancy - which I should like to call to your attention.- In spiritual as in material affairs it is sometimes true that fidelity to the public good ~~[illegible]~~ commands one to be negligent of his own interests.- The exigencies of social existence sometimes force upon those who become public servants a sacrifice, not only of their private worldly advantages - but something also of their own spiritual fortune.- You cannot say that all have an equal chance to become rich, while many who feel called upon to serve the public as Ministers, Editors, book makers or legislators, are thereby set apart from the channels through which wealth flows - and from which it is to be accumulated.- The needs of society ~~[illegible]~~ enforce from some part of its members a service which yields them not much more than their subsistence, and in which they can acquire fortune only by being false to the trust reposed in them.- To some extent exactly the same thing may be said of the individual spiritual interests of various members of society. The work they do - which the world thrives upon the results of their

industry, leaves them spiritually poor in proportion to their faithfulness and devotion, -- You see something of this in the fact that the ordinary business man is continually brought face to face with phases of life which seriously affect his estimate of the ruling forces of existence, - If we could all retire to Monasteries, spend our time in reading religious books; be free from the temptations which bring out our baser passions, and see before us only the gentler side of human nature, - we should easily rest in the conviction that love is the supreme reigning power, and that the throne of goodness is ~~[illegible]~~ not shared with any rival authority,

But no such retirement from the world is permitted us. - All things would soon come to a fatal halt if any considerable number of us should so desert our worldly work; and meanwhile, in ~~[illegible]~~ carrying on the various trades and industries upon which the welfare of society depends, - men are brought so repeatedly into contact with selfishness duplicity and meanness, that it is hard for them to keep alive their faith in the predominance of good and generous motives. - I do not say of course that it is

impossible for ~~him~~ one to do so.- Indeed if he is accustomed to take broad views ~~of life~~ and stops to consider how small a portion of life as a whole is occupied by moral disease, he will find little difficulty in preserving his faith.- But ordinarily - the effort of confronting a man day after day with the baldest examples of a completely self-seeking spirit is to make him skeptical about the influence or power of finer sentiments, and thus to weaken that faith in God which is at bottom, belief in the supremacy of goodness.- It is not a perfectly fair chance, if while God demands of men that they shall do certain work for the good of the world at large - or makes the good of the world depend upon getting this work done, He sets before them in their employment such practical denials of faith as tend to weaken their hold upon spiritual realities.

Still more is this seen in another example. The modern world stands vastly indebted to the votaries of science, who have greatly relieved the hard necessities of physical existence, and who will be found ultimately to have accomplished a great work for religion,- by ~~taking from~~ easing somewhat the ~~burden~~ task of finding subsistence and allowing the average man more time to think

of his spiritual welfare if in no other fashion, — We owe an incalculable debt to that brave and patient class of men — who often in the face of active persecution and generally in defiance of public prejudice, have pushed their investigations and experiments till they have found the key to all but the secret of Nature's secrets, — And yet many of them have paid very dearly for the privilege of bringing this help to their fellows; having sacrificed nothing less than their own faith and much of their own joy — upon what they have come to regard as the altar of scientific truth, — That there have been most devoutly religious minds engaged in scientific pursuits, and that, given a strong faith science is full of noble illustrations of a divine presence, I do not need to be reminded. That there is anything in scientific discoveries which will ultimately destroy — or in the least injure the central truths of religion, I do not for one instant believe, — But for the time being it is notoriously true that scientific circles are largely permeated with skepticism, — Their attention being almost wholly concentrated upon the multiform forms of physical existence, spiritual existence comes to seem to

them a mere adjunct or fleeting quality of material things. Their minds being wholly occupied in the study of laws that are apparently changeless and independent of the guidance of a personal will, they are led to assume that the only Deity is an impersonal and unconscious system of laws governing the action of physical force. – They have looked upon one side of life so constantly and so steadily, that the image of it has become fixed upon their own organs of sight and they can see nothing else whenever they turn their eyes. – Yet it has been just this absorbed, exclusive study of material things which has given us our present store of scientific knowledge. – Almost inevitably – we may say, the larger number of those minds which have given us what we believe will at last benefit religion, as much as it has aided labor and commerce, – these very minds in working out the good of this world have been forced into a narrow one-sided position, in which they have lost so much of their own religious peace and trust, that the remnant, according to orthodox authorities, is not sufficient to save them. – They are shut out of heaven, if we may trust old dogmas, because in searching

out the foundations for the faith of their fellows, they have lost their own faith; Providence makes use of them to uplift the whole life of the world, - and in order to withdraw from them this service, puts them where their own store of heavenly treasure is insensibly filched from them; then as we are asked to believe Providence turns upon them and condemns them because of their spiritual destitution. Is this a perfectly fair and just arrangement?—

This matter of losing one's life for the sake of a larger good - is one not wholly under the control of our own wills,— The completeness and the spirit of the sacrifice undoubtedly depend upon ourselves,— But what I wish to make plain, is, that to considerable extent, we are compelled by the laws which govern us as social beings to be somewhat neglectful of our own highest interests - in order to serve the community effectively. The merchant by ability and industry - and swayed it may be by purely selfish motives, has built up a large business; meaning when his toil has brought him a sufficient reward to throw off the harness and take life easy. — But he finds that he has constructed a machine

in which he himself is caught; he has made himself a public servant, and in defiance of his own wishes he is held to his task. - The great wing-weights you with the perfection of her art, But this, not by of the lot - the perfection has cost her, but - of what she has sacrificed to it. - Such cultivation from gift means the almost entire neglect of other faculties. - When the whole being is thus poured into one channel, it cannot have that diversity of tastes, capacities and employments, which makes the happiest and completest life. - Outside of barbarism indeed, there is scant opportunity for an untrammeled development of the individual in all directions. There, no division of employments is made, and each man combines within himself all trades and industrial callings. - But when civilized society begins, - each one is assigned his special work - and the higher the organization of society is carried, the more rigidly is the individual held to his specialty. - Social development makes the demand more and more absolute, that each one shall give up something of his own life for the good of the whole. - What happens in those factories where the workman who once

was master of the whole and who a certain branch of manufacture, is now tied down to one small part of the whole process, and ~~[illegible]~~ has no skill beyond that small detail of the work on which he is employed, - that is type of society at large. - To such a degree are we made members one of another, that our business in life lies along one narrow groove, - beyond which we are dependent upon our neighbors, moving also in their narrow grooves. -- We are sinking our lives, in the life of community, - "living into the life of humanity", as the phrase runs, not merely as the fulfilment of religious ideal, but as an actual fact in political economy, brought about by the action of general laws which had no shaper nor wills consent or rebel. --

As the growth of specialties takes from the workman his completeness of industrial knowledge and skill, so in higher realms of character, the tendency of things tends to breed specialized types; makes us the ~~contrast~~ complement our counterpart of each other, rather than like-minded or mutually welcome of each other's feelings and beliefs. This means, in ~~[illegible]~~ extreme instances, as I have pointed out - that the man set to do special work for the benefit of the whole may thereby ~~[illegible]~~ lose

the richest part of life, may condemn himself — on old theories, which ~~[illegible]~~ before you the ideal of belief final separation from God, is a future of endless woe. — It is not willful blindness to God's light, not love of sin, not rebellious persistence in a wicked course, which produces this result, but simple fulfilment of Christ's command to lose and forget one's own life in devotion to larger interests. — No doubt if one makes it his highest aim to save his own soul in the orthodox fashion, to arrive at certain beliefs and states of mind, he can do it. — But to make that his one aim is what he cannot do. — What the powers above will not allow him to do. — They tempt him and command him to forget what is for his own highest good, and set him instead to working for the highest good of the world about him; — in which work it may more easily show not — miss the conditions of salvation as they are defined for us. —

This may seem thus far not the most profitable ground to go over — ~~though~~. — But I have an aim in view which will I trust justify the method of reaching it. — The first conclusion I ~~reach~~ deduce from all this is that salvation, however you may define it — is not

purely an individual - but partly also a social affair. That we are so truly members one of another, as not only to be mutually dependent upon one each, - but to be able also to carry each other into heaven. -- This is not nearly so paradoxical a proposition as it may at first appear. The truth that each soul carries its own heaven or hell within itself may be pushed too far. - Our happiness and our joy lie partly in our surroundings; - more particularly in the society with which we are privileged or condemned to associate. - We cannot feed forever on our own thoughts however pure or lofty they may be, but demand congenial fellowship. And though we have not many ideas, nor much strong moral vitality of our own, we can enter into the spirit and intelligence of our associates. Part of heaven is the society of the good and pure, and those whom the love of the good and pure adopts - are, so far at least, admitted into heaven. -- While the notion of the Jew that simply as one of the seed of Abraham - and as a member of the chosen nation - he was sure of paradise, was clearly nothing but a notion; while we justly condemn the belief that the Church is a

magical vehicle which takes all who join it, through to the abode of the blest, still there is something in the idea that people who belong by ties of friendship and sentiment to a certain society - follow the fortunes of that society in the life to come - and are not judged with absolute strictness by their own personal merits or demerits. -- We are not only so many different individualities in the sight of God, brought to a certain test and ranked accordingly - as the recruiting sergeant measures his men and places them according to their height, without reference to other considerations. - We are in the sight of God - we may be one - so many families - and communities, as well; and as God respects these social ties on earth we have very reason to believe that they will have their weight in heaven. - There is something in the idea that people are saved by belonging to a Church, for which purely formal and accidental relationship count for nothing. one does take on the character of a society - to which his sympathies and interests are joined, - These ties of association are a real part of us - and as they hold us here. we have very reason to suppose that they will help to decide our fate hereafter.

And now I am ready to make the point toward which I have been aiming - which is that it is the business of religion not to think only of saving individual souls, but to think and of saving society - of rescuing, or civilizing from the folly which older civilizations have met; ~~to think and found~~ particularly that it should be the main concern of every man in his own religion, not to provide for himself a blessed future, but to build up a kingdom of God in the hearts of all men. --- The laws of God as we find them in the world about us, whether we are selfish or unselfish - generous or mean - compel us to serve our fellow men, - and often we get little of the benefit which accrues to others as the result of our labors. - The teachings of Christ hold before us continually not our own reward - but the good of others - as the end for which we are to work. - "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" was a question which met from him a hard answer, for he held the questioner in effect to give up thinking about his own life - and devote himself ~~and~~ and his possessions ~~and land~~ to securing eternal life for his fellows. --

Religion should conform in spirit and intent to these laws of God and these teachings of Christ, - and to that end it must ~~take hold~~ put somewhat into the background the thoughts and promises - which keep the soul mainly anxious about its own destiny,

and leave it indifferent ~~to~~ towards the spiritual welfare of mankind. — The one accusation continually brought against the teaching which bears the name of ~~religion~~ liberal is religious — is that it encourages the soul to adopt loose views of its own responsibility, — teaches men to place an infinite good action — upon the basis of Divine justice and to hope for it but while they are doing the work.

It is no new growth or development for religious persons that influences us, we are told — but a new breaking down of the old sanctities and authorities, — We are supposed not to be strong enough and manful enough to face the awful realities of life and death, and therefore intent upon devising a system of belief which shall sit easier upon our weaker consciences and more lax religious spirit; In a word it is said of that new movement which is working itself free within all denominational lines, and which is striving to speak out in favor — not of sects, but of order, more equitable and more natural laws of salvation, that it proceeds from a wandering reason than a strengthening of religious faith. — If this were a true account of the liberal movement, it would deserve no one's respect — and would long ago have perished under the shame to which it has been subjected. But it is not a true account, — let me set before

you the real action of that movement, which is soon to form a new dispensation, and which the ascetics ~~of~~ from who misunderstand it ~~as~~ an foul-helping ground. – If one goes back a little way in the history of religion, he finds it committed in the frankest, most outspoken way to purely selfish ends. – It was formerly no instrument by which man tried to help his brother, – It was no means of working out a pure and noble society, but simply a set of forms which each one ~~practised~~ observed for his own advantage in mind body and estate, – Now while Christ came to compel religion of an entirely different stamp, – religion which enjoined upon men absolute contempt for their own mind body and estate, and made it their great aim to accomplish the world's regeneration, – That was religion which roused the mind and fired the heart – with a power ~~hitherto~~ before unknown. – Under its influence Paul could declare that for his brethren's sake he was ready to be accursed. All its apostles – roused by a passionate desire to bring all mankind to the light their eyes had found – went out among men to perform deeds, which no party-spirit or lust of gain and fame – has ever inspired. They had wholly dropped the business of saving their

own souls, or looked upon it simply as an incident not at all as the end of their religion, that they themselves were to gain eternal life by its means. — Any profit they might have from the preaching of the Gospel was to them the smallest of considerations, — and the great effort of their labors and suffering was to impart to all hearers the enthusiasm they had caught from their master for a kingdom of God on earth. This enthusiasm they put into christianity, which has always been, in distinction from Tibet or Ethnic religions a missionary force. — But the new spirit became involved with the calculational teaching of the selfish type. — So that in the history of Christianity you see these two currents of life — two types of character — mixed and intermingled first in the strangest way! — One current or one type practising religion on the old plan — of providing for the end of their worshipper a way into heaven, the other, swayed now by the Christian ideal of getting all men into a renewed and perfected society. — You will find the mendicant religious orders of the middle ages — doing and daring in the most heroic fashion to carry the light of their religion into the outermost darkness of paganism, — and the religious belief of the Reformation found with new political

ends and social ideals. And yet strange are this while to say so much as even there are multitudes of Christians to whom their religion means nothing but a way provided whereby they may flee from the wrath to come, and in good time secure themselves in a place of safety. — The religion of such is as completely selfish as that of the most benighted heathen, and to cast out of religion this second decree of selfishness is the new great aim of the movement called liberal.

The leaders do not understand this movement any more than we are putting the eternal interests of men in jeopardy; and when we ask them the danger lies, they say in unbelieving that we are making men less anxious about the salvation of their souls. — Precisely, we reply with great emphasis. That is exactly and above all things what we are trying to do, only we go further and in place of their selfish hope of heaven or fear of hell — we would awaken in the minds of men a far nobler anxiety, in behalf of the interests of humanity, and would have them, instead of going about so easily and fearfully to accomplish their own salvation, fearlessly leave their own salvation in the hands of God — while they give their

lives is devoted unpaid work, -- when the apostle defined pure religion to be that which visits the fatherless and widows in their affliction - he plainly indicates a religion which consists mainly in the service of humanity, not one which is a matter of ritualism and ceremonies, -- and if pure religion upon that basis, is we may be sure the legitimate fruit of the movement which is beginning in this the fruitless of Christendom, however little many who are feeling this stir may comprehend whence it is beating them, -- They are sure to see at ~~last~~ last, that for one to be intent upon securing for himself the prize of unbroken joy - or content, thinking he has won this prize - while vast multitudes, are chained in bonds of suffering, is no whit less ignoble than as if in time of famine, when thousands were perishing for want of bread - one should spend his time in feasting upon a private store of ~~p~~ dainties, which he had hoarded or found, - In such case one's supply might not be enough to feed all the hungry; but he would let it go as far as it might; and then if help did not arrive, he was enough to die with his fellows, setting for them to the last an example of fortitude and patience, - So if we cannot

cure all the sin in the world - we can at least do what is possible toward that end, - and then be content to follow the souls of others, into something lower than the highest heaven, if we can still keep them toward the light; - rather than leave them in hopeless misery - while we pass by - to enter into a blissful unclouded by remembrance of their pains, -

But - religious authorities tell us if they choose, that such an aim as this comes from a decaying and relaxing christian consciousness, - and indulge themselves in that delusion. - So even while Christ was telling his disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and pharisees, if they wished to see the kingdom of God, he was accused of destroying morals and religion. We should know perfectly that this growing purpose to rid religion of the degrading influence of a selfish character for heaven, proceeds from a new and purer development of christianity, - one which carries it more the master's own spirit, - which sets before us harder tasks, and lays upon us more solemn obligations, than those imposed by church dogmas and theories, - do you think it is an easier view of life that we are seeking - when we declare that there can be for any of us no whole or perfect salvation, except as the

world is also saved? - Is that the less exacting religion which makes me my brothers' keeper, responsible in some measure for his eternal interests as well as my own, or that which assures me that by subscribing to a certain form of belief I can purchase heavenly blessings for my own soul - let my brother fare as he may? - This problem that liberalism means indifference and loose thinking - may serve as a catch word for the ignorant - but nobody of sense will be deceived by it. - At heart liberalism comes from ~~clear~~ clearer perception, larger thinking - and deeper interest in spiritual truth. Not all whom one finds in liberal churches, have fully caught the spirit of the movement, but at least their presence there betokens that they are seeking a religion which has in it more of Christ's spirit than they find elsewhere. - They are not ~~fain~~ fleeing from the pulpits where their sins are denounced. - Indeed that is something which the mythical being called the "average man" - very much enjoys. - He repents for the moment - and feels as virtuous as if he had conquered for himself a sainthip. - But he who is somewhat above the average man seeks that his better nature may be roused to action - and that not selfish fear for his own soul - but inspiring faith in

his power to help other souls - may lead him in thought and deed more faithfully to follow the example of Christ. - In one sense the new movement is designed to ease the conscience. - It is easier ~~for~~ the reason to believe in a righteousness which connects itself with the plain laws of good conduct - than one which is made to depend upon abstruse metaphysical doctrines, which seem to ~~have~~ bear no relation to our every day life. - It is easier to accept heart and soul - a religion which springs out of the ~~hearts~~ minds own best impulses; easier to make the beauty and authority of Christ's life evident and commanding - when our own conscience interprets his labors and sufferings - than when his work and influence are placed into an artificial theory of life. which remains always in the clouds and never appears in or is suggested by our own observation and experience. But the inward purpose - which now begins to promise a new and wide unfolding of a higher christianity. is in no other sense one which looks toward easier living. - Its voice is not that of the Siren to lull us to sleep - but that of the trumpet. to call us to our duty. - Its design is not to lessen or weaken life's responsibilities, but to substitute for selfish eagerness in the pursuit of heavenly joys - that inspire

of Christ which bids all men lose sight of their own lives in their care for the Kingdom of God. —

In one way the new christianity will make less of the church. — It will not insist ~~t~~ as men have heretofore insisted that all good must run in ecclesiastical channels. — It will ~~sanct~~ sanctify the service which is given to right and truth, in commercial and state affairs; in secular charities and philanthropic enterprises. — It will not shut the gates of heaven against the great scientist or great soldier — whose labors have blessed the world, — though he has lost his own faith in a divine revelation, or though his virtues may not be exactly those of a christian martyr. — Its Kingdom of heaven — will be no narrow circle of the elect, but — a redeemed and purified society — whose weakest member shall be brought nearer to God through the ties of social relations.

But — in another way the new christianity will make vastly more of religious fellowship and public worship than men has been made before; for it will largely increase the demand for that inspiration and incentive toward ~~g~~ the best living — which it is the main office of the Church to supply. — So long as it is the ~~only~~ only or highest care of the soul — to ensure its own salvation, after it has complied with

the prescribed terms - it has not much need of the church; But when men and women set to work to accomplish the world's salvation - they have need of all the support and spur they can gather from the appliances of organized religion - every day of their lives, - - The Church may less and less supply the methods and instrumentalities by which good work is done; - But more and more, it will be her office to inspire and quicken, and strengthen the love of God and man out of which good works proceed. - -

We are approaching a time when the spirit of Christ is to be made more fully manifest in his followers; through a devotion to the work God gives them to do, which shall rank above their personal hopes and conquer their personal fears. - Spite of the perils of freedom, so often pointed out; spite of the misunderstanding of foes and the worse misunderstanding of would be friends, - let us resolutely and steadfastly set our faces toward this new dawn, - praying that its light may swiftly increase - till the purer christian life stands fully revealed, to itself - and all the world. —